

OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

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I. INTRODUCTION

California law (Government Code Section 65302) requires that an Open Space Element be prepared as one of the seven mandatory elements of the General Plan. Open Space is defined (Government Code Section 65560) as:

- ☐ Lands for the preservation of natural resources;
- ☐ Lands for the managed production of resources;
- ☐ Lands for outdoor recreation; and
- ☐ Lands for public health and safety.

The City of Laguna Woods Open Space Element provides for maintenance of lands for scenic beauty and wildlife habitat. The recreational needs of the community are also considered, and direction for meeting these needs is provided.

The Open Space Element is organized in two sections:

Policy Document

The Policy Document provides the guidance that allows the City to meet the open space and recreation needs of the community. Direction is provided in the form of “Objectives”, “Policies”, and “Implementation Measures”.

Desired outcomes are stated as Objectives in the Policy Document. These reflect the community’s expectations about the City’s role in providing open space and recreation opportunities. Policies set forth in this document suggest a basis for a range of possible strategies for achieving outcomes defined as Objectives. Implementation Measures are statements of specific actions to be taken, consistent with Policies, to achieve Objectives.

Background Report

The Background Report includes the *Current Setting* section describing existing open space areas and recreational opportunities in and around the City of Laguna Woods.

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The *Issues, Opportunities, and Constraints* section identifies the factors that shaped the future-oriented Policy Document component of the Open Space Element. This section is derived from input of participants at a series of General Plan community workshops and based on analysis by planning staff. *Issues, Opportunities, and Constraints* are key considerations that shaped the Policy Document.

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II. POLICY DOCUMENT

A. Objectives, Policies, and Implementation Measures

The future direction of the City in matters related to open space and recreation is broadly defined by Objectives set forth in this section. Objectives reflect the community's aspirations for enhancing open space and recreational opportunities in the City of Laguna Woods.

Policies in this section suggest courses of action for seizing opportunities that will move the City toward achieving Objectives set forth in the Open Space Element consistent with the overall development scenario of the General Plan.

Implementation Measures are specific actions to be taken to achieve Objectives. They are specific, discreet steps that may be included in the City's work programs consistent with adoption of annual municipal budgets. Implementation Measures typically involve capital improvement and public services programs.

Objective I: Provide access to recreational opportunities for the unique population of the City of Laguna Woods.

Policy I.A: As part of the annual budget adoption process, identify City funding and staffing available for recreation programs.

Implementation Measure:

I.A.1 Work with staff of each of the residential communities in the City of Laguna Woods to develop programs for pooling resources to meet recreational needs of residents.

I.A.2 Coordinate with surrounding cities, the County of Orange, and with public and private Not-for-Profit organizations to expand affordable recreation and cultural opportunities for residents.

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- I.A.3 Organize annual City events to bring people together as residents of the City of Laguna Woods.

Objective II. Include recreation and open space needs of the community in planning for development of currently undeveloped properties.

Policy II.A. Actively pursue opportunities for additional local and regional public open space appropriate to the needs of the community.

Implementation Measure:

- II.A.1 Consider adopting a parkland dedication ordinance and in-lieu fee ordinance applicable to new commercial development, and to new residential development not subject to the City's Quimby Act Ordinance.
- II.A.2 Actively support the development of a regional park and cultural and recreation facilities at the former Marine Corps Air Station – El Toro.
- II.A.3 Identify the long-term need for municipal facilities including those for recreation uses.
- II.A.4 Work with the Laguna Canyon Foundation to include the Laguna Laurel and “Rossmoor Partners” properties as part of the Laguna Coast Wilderness Park.
- II.A.5 Adopt zoning ordinance provisions to protect and preserve the wildlife habitats on portions of the 45-acre Southern California Edison right-of-way, on the 23-acre property between Via Campo Verde and the Aliso Viejo golf course, and on the 10-acre Woods End Nature Reserve property at El Toro Road at the terminus of Aliso Creek Road.
- II.A.6 Adopt zoning ordinance definitions for permissible uses in Open Space zones.

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- II.A.7. Adopt zoning ordinance provisions requiring that replacement, redevelopment, and/or relocation of any Leisure World Clubhouse facility not result in a net loss of land area reserved and maintained for recreational uses.
- II.A.8. Encourage the inclusion of unpaved open space areas and recreational amenities within new developments, both public and private.
- II.A.9. Encourage the creation, acquisition and protection of open space lands (environmentally sensitive areas, riparian corridors, wetlands, and buffer zones, etc.) that have a benefit for habitat, recreation, water quality, and the environment.
- II.A.10. Encourage use of stormwater management principles and the location of compatible water quality treatment control projects on open space lands.

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III. BACKGROUND REPORT

A. Existing Conditions

Regional Open Space

Southern Orange County includes open space areas accessible and in close proximity to the City of Laguna Woods. This regional open space provides recreational opportunities and aesthetic enjoyment to residents of the City of Laguna Woods.

Regional facilities serving the City of Laguna Woods include Laguna Coast Wilderness Park that adjoins the westerly boundary of the City (Exhibit OS-1). Hiking, bicycling, and horseback riding trails traverse the park which is itself a portion of the Laguna Greenbelt that extends through the San Joaquin Hills along Laguna Canyon Road to the ocean. The Laguna Coast Wilderness Park headquarters and interpretive center are located on Laguna Canyon Road approximately two miles south of the City.

Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park is located to the southwest of the City east of El Toro Road (Exhibit OS-1). Also part of the Laguna Greenbelt, this park follows the San Joaquin Hills to Aliso Beach in South Laguna. Trails provide access through the park to other regional recreational facilities including Laguna Niguel Regional Park and Salt Creek Regional Park in Laguna Niguel.

Local Open Space for Recreation

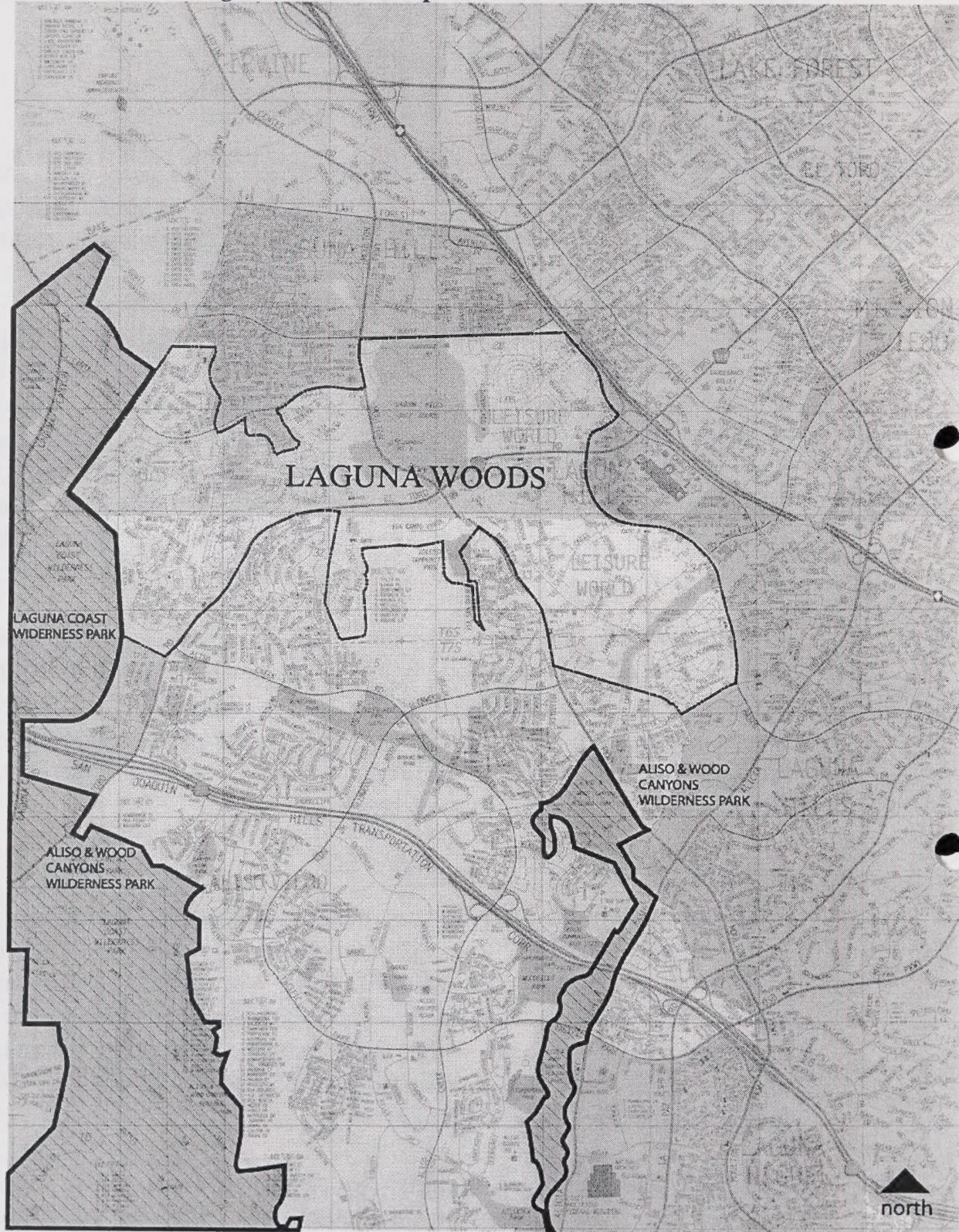
The City of Laguna Woods was nearly built-out at the time of its incorporation in 1999. Prior to incorporation, development proceeded pursuant to the County's Rossmoor Leisure World Planned Community zoning designation. Recreational facilities were developed for the exclusive use of residents within the Leisure World gated community. Of the 13,252* dwelling units in the City of Laguna Woods, 12,736 are located inside the Leisure World gates.

Leisure World recreation facilities are shown in Table OS-1. Most of these facilities are located at Clubhouses that, with the exception of

*Leisure World Building Directory, 1998 Golden Rain Foundation; City of Laguna Woods Zoning Ordinance, "Rossmoor Leisure World Planned Community District".

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Exhibit OS - 1: Regional Parks Map



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Table OS - 1: Leisure World Recreation Facilities

Recreation Facility	Quantity
Clubhouses	6
Pools	5
Fully Equipped Fitness Center	2
Shuffleboard Courts	12
Bocce Courts	3
Tennis Courts	12
Auditorium/Theater	1
Craft Workshops	10
Equestrian Facility	1
Garden Centers	2
Golf Courses	2
Golf Driving Range	1

Clubhouse 2, are included within residential land use designations in the Land Use Plan of the Land Use Element. Those recreation facilities designated as “Open Space” are indicated in Table OS-2. All facilities in Table OS-2 were designed for specific recreational activities, and as such, are considered “active” uses of open space.

After incorporation, the City of Laguna Woods developed a 12,000 square-foot dog park at the northern edge of the City. The dog park, however, is located on a portion of the right-of-way reserved for the future widening of Ridge Route Drive and cannot be included as permanent open space.

Table OS - 2: Local Open Space for Recreational Use

Facility	Acreage
Leisure World Tennis Courts/Driving Range	9
Leisure World Leisure Golf Course	12
Leisure World 18-Hole Golf Course	262
Iglesia Park	6
Total	289

The six-acre Iglesia Park in the City of Aliso Viejo is available to Laguna Woods residents. A softball diamond, clubhouse, and lighted

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tennis courts are provided. The Park adjoins the City of Laguna Woods in an area west of Moulton Parkway and south of El Toro Road and was developed as part of the Rossmoor Leisure World Planned Community that included all of what is now the City of Laguna Woods. On-going maintenance of the park is funded through assessments on properties served by the park including properties in the City of Laguna Woods.

Local Open Space for Resource Preservation

A ten-acre parcel adjoining El Toro Road opposite the terminus of Aliso Creek Road and the extensive Southern California Edison right-of-way on the southwesterly edge of the City are indicated as "Open Space" on the General Plan Land Use Map. The ten-acre parcel was annexed into the City in 2002 and had been indicated for low-density residential development in the County General Plan. Both properties are considered "passive" open space, valued more for their relatively undisturbed natural states than their use as recreation venues. Both afford scenic vistas, resource preservation, and wildlife habitat in an otherwise urban setting.

Aliso Creek passes through the southeasterly portion of the City of Laguna Woods within the gated Leisure World community (Exhibit OS-2). The creek plain includes approximately sixteen acres of riparian vegetation community. Because of the value of this community to wildlife, this area is considered a sensitive habitat by regulatory agencies including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the California Department of Fish and Game.

The Aliso Creek corridor also provides recreational opportunities. Trail linkages from the Cleveland National Forest in the Santa Ana Mountains to the ocean at South Laguna are included along the banks of Aliso Creek through the City of Laguna Woods. Although not open to the general public, Aliso Creek is accessible to the 97% of the City of Laguna Woods population residing within the Leisure World gates.

While not reserved solely for open space purposes, the Southern California Edison right-of-way provides approximately 45 acres of largely undisturbed land (Table OS-3). The right-of-way serves as a wildlife habitat and a continuation of the open expanse of the adjacent Laguna Coast Wilderness Park.

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Exhibit OS - 2: Open Space Map

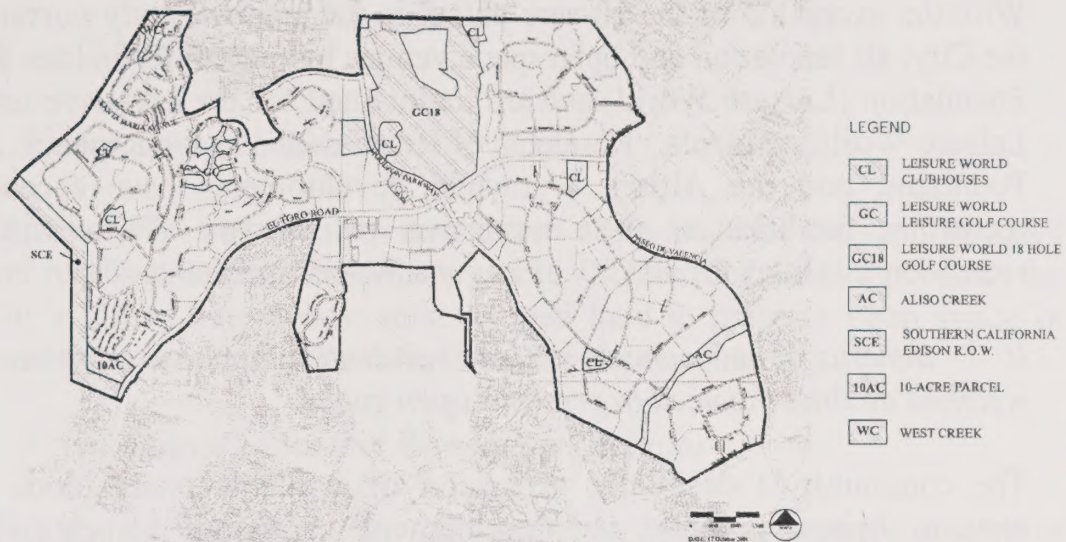


Table OS - 3: Local Open Space for Resource Preservation

Open Space Resource	Acreage
Aliso Creek	16
Southern California Edison Right-of-Way	45
10-acre parcel on El Toro Road @ terminus of Aliso Creek Road	10
Total	71

B. Issues, Opportunities, and Constraints

Community workshops and meetings of the General Plan Coordinating Committee produced a broad range of comments about the open space and recreational needs of the community. Planning staff defined a strategy for meeting these needs based on the Issues, Opportunities, and Constraints presented below.

1. Issues

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- a. No open space and recreation opportunities exist in the City of Laguna Woods apart from those in Leisure World*

With the exception of the 10-acre parcel in the southwesterly portion of the City, all recreation and open space venues belong to the Golden Rain Foundation (Leisure World) and are maintained for the exclusive use of Leisure World residents. Residents of Renaissance at the Regency, The Fountains, and the Alterra Wynwood developments have access to recreation facilities at their respective residences. There are no recreation facilities for all City of Laguna Woods residents.

- b. Benefits of new commercial and residential land uses must be weighed against the need to preserve open space.*

The community's desire for expansion of available retail goods and services brings pressure for development of vacant parcels which otherwise might be retained as open space. Some residents suggested, for example, that vacant land opposite Gate 12 on Moulton Parkway should be the site for a new restaurant while others suggested that this land be improved as an urban park.

2. Opportunities

- a. Southern California Edison right-of-way*

The 340-foot wide right-of-way extends for more than a mile along the southwesterly edge of the City and comprises approximately 45 acres. Although large transmission towers carry high voltage power lines through this corridor, the land is adjacent to the Laguna Coast Wilderness Park and largely undisturbed. The land provides a significant wildlife habitat.

- b. Former Marine Corps Air Station – El Toro*

The former Marine Corps Air Station – El Toro provides the opportunity for preserving open space in the form of a regional park that would serve residents of area cities including the City of Laguna Woods.

- c. Parkland Dedication or In-lieu Fees*

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State law permits cities to require parkland dedication or payment of in-lieu fees in conjunction with approval of tentative and parcel maps for residential developments.

3. Constraints

a. Fiscal Constraints

Constitutional and statutory restrictions at the State level restrict revenue and funding sources available to cities. These fiscal constraints limit the City's ability to purchase undeveloped land to preserve open space or provide park and recreation facilities for the community.

b. Private Open Space and Recreation Facilities

With the exception of a ten-acre parcel in the southwesterly portion of the City and Iglesia Park which adjoins the City of Laguna Woods and is located in the City of Aliso Viejo, all open space and recreation facilities are owned by the Golden Rain Foundation for the exclusive use of Leisure World residents. City of Laguna Woods residents in Renaissance at the Regency, The Fountains, and Alterra Wynwood and their guests are not availed of the use of comparable open space and recreation facilities in the City.

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